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ABSTRACT

A study recruited students, parents, guidance counselors, and school administrators to participate in eight focus group discussions regarding implementation of new approaches to career guidance and counseling designed to support Wisconsin's School-to-Work Transition Initiative. Participants voiced strong support for fundamentally changing the school system. They expressed strong support for the function of student guidance and counseling but were concerned that an insufficient number of counselors were available. They identified no system organized to help students make essential connections with the world of work and the world after high school. Students, parents, and counselors supported the idea that students ought to develop an individualized career plan. Participants expressed strong support for a community-based career information center that provided for direct business participation. Counselors viewed the proposed changes as appropriate to assist the continued implementation of the Wisconsin Developmental Guidance Model (WDGM). These elements of a guidance and counseling model were recommended: career awareness activities; preparation of a career plan; use of a community-based career center; learning opportunities delivered through practical, hands-on experiences; guidance and counseling services fully integrated with the school curriculum; and career counseling that supports WDGM's holistic vision. (YLB)

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Wisconsin Focuses on Career Guidance

Parents, Students, Guidance Counselors and School Administrators Talk About Career Counseling and the School-to-Work Transition Initiative

A Report on Focus Group Discussions Conducted by Jobs for the Future, Inc. for the State Superintendent, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

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April 1993

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Table of Contents

I. Executive Summary....1

II. Introduction....5

III. Observations of Parents, Students, Counselors and Administrators....11

- General Observations About School-to-Work Transition and the Purposes of Education....11
- Observations About Career Guidance and Counseling....17
- General Reactions to the Report of the K-12 Counseling Implementation Panel....19
- How Students Obtain Career Information and Make Choices....20
- The Role of Labor Market Information....26
- Reactions to the Proposed Community-based Career Center....27
- The Role of Counselors in the School-to-Work Transition Initiative....31
- The Role of Teachers in the School-to-Work Transition Initiative....33
- The Role of Business and Industry in the School-to-Work Transition Initiative....36
- Reactions to Proposals for Social Service Referral....37
- Proposed Activities for a New System....39

IV. Recommendations....43

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- *Bob Jasna, Deputy Superintendent of Schools, Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.*
- *Mary Skalecki, Principal, and Reg Jungwirth, Counselor, West Bend East High School, West Bend, Wisconsin.*

I. Executive Summary

This report presents major findings and makes a series of recommendations regarding the implementation of new approaches to career guidance and counseling designed to support Wisconsin's School-to-Work Transition Initiative. The findings are based on eight focus group discussions that took place with students, parents, guidance counselors, and school administrators in Wisconsin during March of 1993.

The following observations summarize some of the major positions these groups expressed during the focus group discussions:

- Students, parents, counselors, and school administrators voiced **strong support for fundamentally changing the school system,** and welcome the proposals that are part of the School-to-Work Transition Initiative. Students especially value hands-on learning opportunities, and expressed frustration that the school system is not designed to deliver a greater amount of experiential learning.
- Focus group participants expressed strong support for the function of student guidance and counseling, but also voiced the concern that an **insufficient number of counselors** were available in schools to support the activities necessary to implement a school-to-work philosophy.
- The process for preparing for a life after high school, whether it is termed 'career guidance' or 'college counseling' or any of a variety of terms, is currently ad hoc. There is no regular source of labor market information available to students. Student connections with the world of work and the world after high school are neither systematic nor organized to provide effective learning experiences. The burden of sorting through a variety of piecemeal experiences lies solely with each individual student—**there is no system organized to help students make these essential connections.**
- Students, parents, and counselors supported the idea that students ought to **develop an individualized 'career plan'.** Such a plan would tie together experiences gained from several activities, including formal and informal learning, career exploration, job shadowing, part-time jobs, and other broad experiences. The plan would represent a student's tentative

focus, and would provide a benchmark from which to compare all other learning encounters—including youth apprentice learning—during the remainder of high school.

The groups spoke only about a *career* plan, and did not focus on any broader concept, such as an individualized student learning plan that might incorporate goal setting, self-evaluation, academic planning, plus a broader look at choices for the post-high school years.

- Participants expressed **strong support for a community-based career information center** that provides for direct participation by business and industry.
- Counselors view the proposed changes as appropriate resources to assist the **continued implementation of the Wisconsin Developmental Guidance Model.**
- The preparation and **licensing** of both counselors and teachers will require significant changes to support a school-to-work focus.
- Virtually every focus group was unanimous in believing that **community social services are unable to accommodate counseling needs** of students.

Overall, the group discussions outlined a fairly clear vision of the essential elements of a guidance and counseling model that would support a school-to-work initiative. Briefly, these elements are:

- **systematic, regularized career awareness activities that begin during the early middle school years**, which might include career days, field trips, release time from school to enable children to go to work with a parent or neighbor, etc.;
- structured job shadowing during the late middle school years, continuing into the ninth and tenth grades, that give students **direct, in-depth, hands-on (to the extent practicable) experiences** with employers;
- preparation of a specific **career plan** that:
  - builds on practical knowledge gained in job shadowing;
  - uses all resources available to help a student express a proposed focus in a career plan that lays out some clear, realistic options for completing high school and continuing on to postsecondary experiences;

- puts down on paper a student's affirmative choice of a career plan that is very flexible at the beginning and narrows as one gets older and develops more outside-school experience; and

- should be part of a broader individualized goal-setting process whereby a student has identified a range of post-high school goals;

- the use of a **community-based career center** that contains reliable, easy-to-use information about employers, occupations, wages, job openings, skill qualifications, and education or training options;

- a fundamental re-orientation of how learning is delivered so that formal schooling has far more **learning opportunities delivered through practical, hands-on experience** and approaches;

- **guidance and counseling services that are fully integrated with the school curriculum;**

- **career counseling that helps a student constantly re-evaluate the continued validity of a career plan by reviewing the impact of school-based and work-based experiences;**

- career counseling that supports the **holistic vision** of the Wisconsin Developmental Guidance Model.

II. Introduction

This report presents major findings and makes a series of recommendations regarding the implementation of new approaches to career guidance and counseling designed to support Wisconsin's School-to-Work Transition Initiative. The findings are based on eight focus group discussions that took place with students, parents, guidance counselors, and school administrators in Wisconsin during March of 1993.

Focus groups are an ideal research tool for understanding how people think about issues, products, or programs. Focus group discussions organize the process of a conversation to see how and where people arrive at a clear position on issues. They help mark the language people use to talk about specific topics, and test how people react to various personal and policy options.

Staff from high schools, school districts, and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction recruited participants for these discussions. Participants were selected to be broadly representative of their community—with students, for example, schools recruited a group representing a variety of backgrounds and postsecondary plans. Parents were recruited to reasonably represent education and income levels within the community. Guidance counselors were drawn from throughout most of Wisconsin, and included counseling staff from elementary, middle school, and the high school levels. School administrators, principals as well as central administrative staff, were drawn from throughout the Milwaukee Public School district.

Statewide Panel Develops New Approaches to Career Counseling and Guidance

The concepts tested in this project consist of recommendations made by a statewide policy committee—the K-12 Guidance Implementation Panel (Panel). To help students and their parents make effective decisions in the school-to-work transition, the Governor's Cabinet for a Quality Workforce, in cooperation with the Department of Public Instruction, appointed the Panel, and charged it with the responsibility of developing new approaches to career guidance and counseling that would support school-to-work transition. The Panel's work was financed by an implementation grant from the national Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).

Wisconsin's State Superintendent had earlier used a design grant from CCSSO to support a series of focus groups with parents and students to help design a youth apprenticeship system for the state. That report, **Voices from School and Home: Wisconsin Parents and Students Focus on Youth Apprenticeship**, revealed strong support from parents and students for the concept of youth apprenticeship and hands-on, work-based learning. The report pointed out, however, that:

> **[p]arents and students have little faith in high school counseling departments and do not believe that high school counselors are currently capable of exposing students to the real world of work...The majority of parents and students [in these groups] believe that the career counseling system will have to change dramatically before students will be prepared to make a decision about the [school-to-work transition] by the end of their sophomore year.**

The Panel was charged with creating a statewide system of career guidance and counseling support services for all of Wisconsin's youth, especially those who faced the special choice to participate in Wisconsin's School-to-Work Transition Initiative. The purpose of the group was to recommend new approaches to the statewide K-12 guidance system that join both academic and career information so that 10th graders and their parents can make informed choices about entering Tech Prep, Youth Apprenticeship and/or college preparation.

The Panels recommendations, which were published in the policy report **New Approaches to Career Counseling and Guidance**, fell into four main areas:

- **Create a new career information and employment data system.** The Panel noted that improving the school-to-work transition for high school youth was impossible without having a systemic data base of labor market information and job choices. Currently, no state has labor market information that is collected, analyzed, then made available to actually serve job seekers and young persons entering the labor force.

  The Panel recommended that (a) the state's Occupational Education Training Information System be upgrade to provide labor supply data; (b) employers be required to provide 'demand side' data (partially in exchange for a streamlined data collection process); (c) that labor market information be made available in user friendly forms; and (d) that Wisconsin encourage changes in the national system of assembling labor market information in ways that support the information needs of job seekers.

- **Establish local Career Resource Information Centers to provide one-stop shopping for youth and adults to access comprehensive career education and job training information.** These Centers would be guided at the community level by a local group comprised of 50% educators and 50% employers. A Center would be managed by a private sector Career Consultant who would act to bring employers in direct contact with youth. The Centers would coordinate career advising for youth with school counselors and parents.
- **Transform the role of school-based guidance counselors to provide greater support to every student's career development.** The Panel recommended developing student career portfolios, coordinating school-based career development activities with the community-based Career Resource Information Centers, support further implementation of the Wisconsin Developmental Guidance Model (see note below), and amend a counselor's job duties to free up additional time for direct student counseling.
- **Establish coordinated social service referral systems so that youth receive help in crisis situations.** For this recommendation, the panel suggested that state and local public and private social and medical service organizations could provide strong support systems for youth. Such a wider community-based network of social services would give school counselors additional time to provide proactive WDGM services, including being more active in meeting the career needs of high school students.

The Wisconsin Developmental Guidance Model (WDGM)

For the past eight years, guidance and counseling in Wisconsin public schools has been oriented around the Wisconsin Developmental Guidance Model (WDGM). The entire Model is too detailed to present in its entirety in this document. However, it is worth presenting a few basic features here, since guidance counselors based their reactions to the K-12 Panel in part because of its impact on meeting the WDGM.

The WDGM is designed to be a framework that integrates guidance services provided by counselors, other school staff, parents, business and industry representatives, and community members. WDGM defines three major developmental areas—learning, personal/social,

and career/vocational. It then illustrates the types of student competencies that must be attained to meet those three areas of need, suggests possible providers and resources to students, recommends certain activities that can help a student meet the competencies, and describes the level of resource organization required for comprehensive school guidance programming.

The Focus Group Discussions

The discussions were conducted by Jobs for the Future, Inc., a national non-profit public policy organization that is working with several states across the nation in designing and implementing youth apprenticeship, work-based learning, and school-to-work transition. These groups took place between March 15 and March 30, 1993.

Focus group discussions organize the process of a conversation to see how and where people arrive at a clear position on issues. They help mark the language people use to talk about specific topics, and test how people react to various personal and policy options. Group discussion crystallizes where people 'start' a discussion, uncovers what they know about specific issues, identifies their perceptions and misperceptions, and determines areas where information or emotional obstacles prevent them from seriously considering the issues and options for action. Group discussions reveal how views change as people have the opportunity to discuss issues and learn from their peers.

There are several ways to describe a good focus group:

- a single focus group consists of about twelve people;
- the participants are chosen because they represent the characteristics of the ultimate target audience—recommendations made by the K-12 Panel will most dramatically affect guidance counselors, students, parents, and school administrators;
- a group discussion lasts for about two hours;
- the discussion is led by a trained moderator who controls the process of group interaction in order to draw out the group's underlying opinions; and
- the discussion follows a pre-determined discussion guide that consists of no more than ten issues or questions—which leaves

flexibility for the moderator to pursue leads and probe issues as they arise during the group discussion.

The strength of focus groups as a tool for good program design is the fact that it is a *group* of people discussing a *single* topic—in this case, youth apprenticeship. In a group context, individuals are influenced by comments of others and form opinions after listening and hearing advice and counsel of those around them.

Analysis of Findings and the Organization of This Report

This report presents major findings and makes a series of recommendations regarding the implementation of new approaches to career guidance and counseling that support Wisconsin's School-to-Work Transition Initiative. The findings are based on eight focus group discussions that took place with students, parents, guidance counselors, and school administrators in Wisconsin during March of 1993.

The report is organized along the following dimensions:

- For the first section, we **tested the acceptance and understanding of the school-to-work transition proposals** planned for the Wisconsin public schools—the establishment of the 10th grade gateway assessment as a milestone after which students would select from among youth apprenticeship, tech prep, or college preparation pathways.

- As the groups understood how the proposed school structures would require a student to make difficult choices at an earlier age, the discussions probed **general thoughts about the purposes of career guidance and counseling.** Participants talked about how students obtain career information and make choices, and possible roles for counselors, teachers, business and industry in school-to-work transition.

- Groups then were asked to **react to the specific recommendations made by the K-12 Panel**—including the concept of the proposed community-based career center, reactions to social service referral, and the availability of labor market information.

- Finally, all participants were asked to **propose a variety of activities** that would support career counseling in a school-to-work transition context.

- Finally, the report presents a series of **policy implications** and **recommendations for implementation** of new approaches to career counseling and guidance in Wisconsin.

III. Observations of Parents, Students, Counselors, and School Administrators

General Observations About School-to-Work Transition and the Purposes of Education

Observation #1. Students, parents, counselors, and administrators spoke clearly and passionately that the state's public education system *must* change in fundamental ways. They view many of the concepts and proposals contained within the Wisconsin School-to-Work Transition Initiative as common sense elements that must be at the core of a different learning system. They view school reform as holding out the opportunity to eliminate unreasonable barriers and inefficiencies that currently leave high school unconnected with postsecondary options. They expressed clear expectations about change as well as a continued frustration with obstructions that slow the effort.

- **School Administrator:** "I don't know why teachers and administrators get so protective of the schools. No other institution in society today has the luxury to operate on such an obsolete model. A major weakness is that schools do not structure themselves as information-based institutions."

- **School Administrator:** "There has been a process that has been going on for years that schools have been an unwitting partner to. Schools have been filters for kids along the way, enabling a few successful kids to continue in education or get the best jobs. We can't afford to have schools be filters because we have a responsibility to all children to help them grow as much as they can. We have to figure out a way to help each kid get along as far as they possibly can. Moreover, I think the problem is a shared problem. Schools and business see themselves as adversaries and we cannot seem to change this. They see themselves as separate from each other."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "The most frequent question I get as a technical school counselor is 'will a two year certificate or diploma from the technical school transfer into the university system?' and the next most asked question is 'why not?' I see the

school-to-work and restructuring effort as the way to link those paths together."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "We have to get the people in the ivory towers to realize they have to give up their territory and be able to admit that it is all right to go back and forth between the technical college and the university. It's so ironic that we teach kids to be flexible and be ready to make many life changes and then the reality is that they walk into the university system and find a totally inflexible system that tells them 'do it our way or don't do it at all.'"

- **School Administrator:** "Work is school. We need to break down the traditional separation between the school and the community. We need to redefine. We need to have a supportive place where children learn as well as thrive."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "We are still under the myth and misconception in this country that unless you have a college degree you are not going to be successful. Things have changed so much in the workforce, it is a whole different ball game."

- **School Administrator:** "Every school administration should be community-based. Teachers and business should be writing curriculum on a joint basis."

- **Parent:** "It's not just high schools, but we need this to start all the way through."

- **Parent:** "Kids can't find their niche because they haven't taken some of the classes that expose them to different things—their schedules are so busy with taking unnecessary but required courses that they have no time to explore something else."

Observation #2. Guidance counselors and school administrators seek a fundamental change in the organization, operation, and mission of the education system. These groups seem to resist programmatic recommendations when they are perceived as being 'just another state mandate.' The purpose of our focus group discussions were to test the specific recommendations of the K-12 Guidance Panel, not to engage in a broad philosophical discussion about the nature of schooling or proposals for major reform. However, most of the discussions went immediately to the level of school reform. It is clear that Wisconsin

has an open 'window of opportunity' to implement a coherent vision of a new learning system that includes many of the concepts that lie at the heart of school-to-work transition. The School-to-Work Transition Initiative may not get the full support it deserves if it is interpreted as a series of marginal programmatic reforms rather than as part of a new systemic learning paradigm.

- **Guidance Counselor:** "I'm not hearing anything different than what we heard before. I'm firmly convinced that this proposal will die on the vine unless we can change our whole educational philosophy to preparing students for the world of work, which includes not only adult skills but workplace skills. That has to be ingrained in the curriculum and it implies we will have to do some real extensive inservice development with teachers and instructors. If we don't ingrain it into the total curriculum it won't happen. You can't expect counselors to pick this ball up and run with it. Our whole philosophy about work in the school systems must change fundamentally at all levels, Kindergarten through 14th grade. As that transition is taking place, a real key element will be the counselors."

- **School Administrator:** "We don't need this school-to-work effort to be just another standard or requirement or state mandate. The system itself has to change fundamentally. If this is just another standard imposed on schools, forget it. Schools are a Model T today."

Observation #3. Some participants expressed confusion and lack of clarity about many of the proposals, including those that are fundamental to Wisconsin's school reform efforts.

- **School Administrator:** "We lack any understanding of the terms that are being floated around like 'tech-prep' and 'youth apprenticeship' and 'school-to-work transition'.

Observation #4. Students place a very high value on hands-on and experiential opportunities. They recognize that the current school system is designed not to deliver experiential learning. This barrier is a significant factor in contributing to students' attitude that school is boring, repetitive, and irrelevant.

- **Student:** *[What's better about hands-on learning?]* "You learn!"
- **Student:** *[What's better about hands-on learning?]* "There is more experience."
- **Student:** *[What's better about hands-on learning?]* "It's easier and faster to learn."
- **Student:** *[What's better about hands-on learning?]* "You're out there actually doing something instead of wasting your time in a classroom watching somebody draw on the blackboard."
- **Student:** "You could know exactly what you want to do. If you don't have a lot of experience in a field and you go into college you could be totally unfocused and realize you've wasted your time. Hands-on means more experience."
- **Student:** "For me its easier to learn if I actually do something. It's easier to understand what its about if you actually do something with it."
- **Student:** "If your parents are trying to teach you to ride a bike they don't give you a lecture and watch you take notes. You keep practicing it until you do it."
- **Student:** "Our classes last for 47 minutes. You could have classes for 15 minutes and get the same thing out of it. We just go over the same thing over and over. It's just drill. I would rather work a 9-to-5 job. Maybe it would require more effort but I would rather work harder at something where I at least feel like I'm accomplishing something. School is just so discouraging."
- **Student:** "I need to take four years of English to meet college entry requirements. So this year I'm taking two easy English classes just to meet that requirement. Sure you need English, but it's clear I'm wasting my time in these classes and not getting anything out of it except just meeting a requirement."
- **Parent:** "You will never find any seniors around here are saying 'Gee, I wish I could come back for another year.' By their junior year, these kids have a pretty good idea of what they are like, what they want to do in life."
- **Student:** "Maybe that's why so many people are dropping out of school. Because they are not getting right to the things they want

to do. They get discouraged. It's almost like taking high school over again where you have to take required courses before you can get into courses where they are actually going to teach something new."

Observation #5. Based on the way students and parents talked about current school experiences, there appears to be little actual movement toward the goals of education reform. Very little time appears to be spent on group projects or on developing teamwork skills. Very little of a school's curriculum seems to be integrated across subject areas. Most of the instruction is of the 'chalk and talk' variety, using lecture techniques, repetitive drills, and book-based approaches. A student cited as a small victory that one daring teacher allowed students to rearrange desks into a circle rather than continuing to sit in straight rows. Others complained that the current school culture does not encourage or value students asking questions. It seemed surprising to hear that assignments in developing better interpersonal skills and communication continue to be isolated from other curriculum subjects. Schools seem to be taking baby steps in adopting new delivery systems.

Observation #6. Students want high school to feel connected with 'the real world', especially in terms of career development. Students voiced very strong opinions that they want to be able to select a career that will lead to a job that is interesting. They are far less motivated by any job's ability to provide income.

- **Student:** "You want to get up each morning and want to go to work."
- **Student:** "I'm interested in architecture. In my school they only have one course to take, and they only taught me some drafting techniques. I didn't learn a thing about how buildings are designed and built. I'm going to attend a technical school to learn more but I'm kind of scared about it because I don't know how to build a house. I know how to draw them but I don't know why things are designed the way they are."
- **Student:** "I want to go into environmental science and conservation. The school only had one or two courses, which I took. But I wanted a lot more and they weren't there."

- **Student:** "I'm getting a sense about what it is like to work in an office. But it's really just up to me if I'm learning anything from it."

- **Student:** "I've taken every science course this school offers. I still think there should be more, and it should be geared more toward what you want to do with that kind of science."

- **Student:** "If you could work in the field where you think you are interested, it would really help you understand if you want to stay in it or not."

- **Student:** "If you work somewhere at least you get your foot in the door and it gives you a good chance to get a job at that company when you get done with school. They know how you work, and you know yourself how good or bad of a job you do there."

- **Student:** *[On scale of one to ten with ten being strongest, how focused are you on getting a good job?]* "10! Your whole life depends on it. I don't see it so much as having a good job. I see it as being interested in a job. You can have a good paying job and hate what you are doing. For me, I'm going to do what I'm interested in and it doesn't matter much what I'll get paid."

Observation #7. Despite their surface support, some focus group participants used disparaging language in talking about careers, school-to-work transition, and youth apprenticeship. They used terms that clearly grant a lower status to these efforts based on their perceived outcomes (e.g., 'blue collar work', 'lower skilled jobs', 'trades') rather than seeing the Transition Initiative as providing better learning opportunities and links with high skill occupations.

- **Guidance Counselor:** "We need to change the image of the choices. It used to be that if you were an apprentice, it meant you were really down the ladder. We are going to have to do some educating of the adult population that these are all parallel tracks—that one is not better than the other but that a student has a choice."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "There is that thought that jobs which will be a part of the apprenticeship and tech prep are less desirable. That's what parents believe."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "I can't picture too many parents saying 'I really want my kid to get into an apprenticeship program.' They want their child to be a lawyer or a doctor."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "To get this off the ground there needs to be lots of parent education. You hear lots of things about tech prep and youth apprenticeship and parents still say 'no that's not for my child.' Most parents want their child to go on to college."

Observations About the Purpose of Guidance and Counseling

Observation #8. Students and parents place a strong value on guidance counselors, and believe that they can play a key role in helping students develop emotionally, socially, and academically. At the same time, parents and students were clear that the quality of counseling services varied considerably across schools, program levels, and counselors. Few students seem to actually speak regularly with any counselor—facts that will affect the implementation of a *system* geared to meeting the needs of all students.

- **Guidance Counselor:** "Once a student is in high school, it is a hit-or-miss proposition whether a student has any career education exposure. Unless it is student-initiated, it isn't going to automatically happen."

- **Parent:** "Students ought to choose the counselor they want. It is so artificial now—you are assigned a counselor by virtue of the first letter of your last name."

- **Student:** "[I see my counselor] only when required to."

- **Student:** "We have to see a counselor once as a senior just to see if we are going to graduate, and to make sure we have applied for college."

- **Parent:** "I don't think the school does a very good job if all it does is link you up with a four-year college. You are not in the real world until you are out of college."

- **Parent:** "Nowadays it's so hard to get a job, if these kids don't start planning early, in their high school years, the kids that did start early will be the ones who get the good jobs. I think stu-

dents need to get help and a direction from the schools—not that anyone should be forced or told what to do. The career focus is a good idea."

- **Parent:** "I have a son that is now just about to finish a registered apprenticeship as an electrician. To be real honest, when he was here at the high school he was on a road that would have taken him to a four-year college. He didn't talk too much about it. I asked him why he wanted to go to college and he said he didn't know. I went in to talk to the guidance counselor and found out there were some things he hadn't really thought about and hadn't been exposed to. He had been heading to college because that's what you do if you don't have a real focus."

Observation #9. Virtually every group discussion agreed that counselors were far too overworked—high student-to-counselor ratios were cited as the most significant barriers that prevented counselors from delivering the quality and quantity of services that students really need. This problem will clearly affect any counselor's ability to achieve qualitatively different outcomes as the state moves to fully implement the Wisconsin Developmental Guidance Model along with the School-To-Work Transition Initiative.

- **Parent:** "You can't dump this responsibility on the guidance system that we have in place today. At our school, we have 1,000 kids and only three guidance counselors. There are some kids there that just drift around and never even talk to their counselors. All they do is sign up for class and leave. The kids that see the counselors the most are those who are having family trouble. At the middle school level, counselors are doing much more actual counseling of kids that are at-risk instead of this career focus."

- **Parent:** "We don't have enough counselors for the kids."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "A lot of this comes down to numbers—the numbers of kids you have to deal with. If you keep adding things to the counselor's basket, the basket will break. It will be most effective to lower your student-to-counselor ratio."

- **School Administrator:** "How can we expect the role of guidance counselors to change given that they have so many responsibili-

ties, like testing, personal and social counseling, work and careers. Counselors are swamped. We can't continue to just add responsibilities. We must prioritize."

General Reactions to the Report of the Counseling Implementation Panel

Observation #10. School counselors believe that they spend a vast majority of their time providing student counseling—a belief that is at odds with the finding of the Department of Public Instruction's report on school standards reviews that noted many counselors are assigned administrative and other non-counseling duties. Some counselors agreed that heavy record keeping and administrative requirements as well as crisis intervention significantly reduced a counselor's time available for proactive duties.

- **Guidance Counselor:** *"[What about the figure in the report of 3% of total time spent on direct counseling?]* Of all the schools I have been in, this would be on the far end of the spectrum in terms of the amount of time counselors actually spend in counseling."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "The Wisconsin Counseling Association completed a survey that reported how counselors spent their time. Working directly with teachers was the top ranked task, face-to-face counseling of students was second, and career education was third."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "That is not true in my school district. To have someone redefining my role in the school because of that information is wrong."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "So much of my time used to be spent in scheduling and registration—lots of time spent on administrative duties and not on what I thought was the main purpose of counseling. The counseling done in the school is primarily crisis prevention or intervention. We also spend a lot of time in committee meetings. That was part of the reason I switched from high school counseling to the elementary level. Now my time is spent more in direct student contact than it was when I worked in a high school."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "At the beginning of the senior year, our counselors are involved in counting credits to see whether a student has the right mix of courses and credits to graduate. To me, that is a clerical function. There is a lot of time spent of this kind of activity."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "There's that phrase in our contract that we are to perform 'other duties as assigned.' It is amazing what school administration can come up with that fits into that clause."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "I agree that most counselors, especially those in smaller schools, have lots of general administrative tasks that take away from actual time counseling."

Observation #11. A few counselors expressed concern that the K-12 Counseling Implementation Panel did not represent smaller or rural schools, and that the proposals contained in the report were better suited for the needs of larger, urban school districts.

- **Guidance Counselor:** "Look at the make-up of the Guidance Implementation Panel. It didn't have small and rural school districts represented. The largest business we have in my school district is a tavern."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "The vast number of school districts are outposts that lack resources. The panel's recommendations might respond well to urban or mid-sized communities but they don't fit a majority of districts throughout the state."

How Students Obtain Career Information and Make Choices

Observation #12. Students obtain information about career options from a variety of places. They piece together information, if at all, from a baffling array of sources. There is no systematic delivery of career-related data. Students get information that often proves to be unreliable or erroneous in an ad hoc fashion through friends, parents, and schools. School career centers, where they exist, are not uniformly viewed as reliable sources of good information.

- **School Administrator:** "Students are heavily influenced by their peers. They make their course decisions and school decisions based on what their friends are doing."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "Kids are already making choices they must live with. If they choose early that they want to go to a technical college, then they will take a sequence of courses that gets them into that choice. Taking those courses means not taking others. Kids can't get to 12th grade and change their mind to decide they want to go to college—they haven't taken the college entry pre-requisites because of their earlier choices."

- **Student:** "I have only spent about one hour [at the career center] since I began high school. I went to ask about architectural design and they didn't really know what it was. There was a book with probably four sentences describing that kind job. And when I actually went to talk with some architects they said something completely different than what was in those books. There seems to be a lot of information about an industry or maybe common jobs, but nothing specific when you look up something that is specific."

- **Student:** "I really wanted to know about jobs in forestry and there wasn't much in our center. My older brother had me visit him at college where he told me lots about forestry. He's been the best resource for me."

- **Student:** "I wanted to be a sports trainer, but a lot of people told me that there wouldn't be any jobs in that field by the time I graduate. For me, it's the availability of jobs when I'm done with school."

- **Parent:** "Parents play a role. My son started going on carpentry jobs with my husband when he was only five years old. He really likes that aspect of it. I'm a nurse and started talking about that around the house and my daughter thinks that it sounds good."

- **Parent:** "When the kid realizes that what the parent is doing isn't very enjoyable, it becomes important in deciding against things, too."

- **Parent:** "Another influence is their peers and what their peers perceive the job is like and what kind of money you can earn.

But there is a lot of peer influence and information that isn't really true. They don't realize the satisfaction from a job isn't normally the pay but how you feel about working the job."

- **Parent:** "Some kids are influenced by teachers."

- **Parent:** "I really think the most important influence is the kid's own experience and what they are exposed to—through their parents, neighbors, things they do on their own."

- **Student:** "My cousin is going into that field. I went to the career center at school and got some magazines listing all the jobs. It sounded real interesting. The information at school is somewhat helpful but a lot of information came from my father and my cousin. That's pretty reliable information because it's coming from someone who works in the same kind of jobs."

- **Student:** "A lot of information comes from teachers because they expose you to a lot of careers through the way that they teach. Take English, for example. My teachers told us a lot about how different jobs use English—like artists and writers and engineers. You get a general feeling of what you might be interested in and then you can take it from there and talk to someone who is in that field."

- **Student:** "My mother made me do something. I told her I had no idea what I wanted to do. She took me to the technical college and I took some tests through the career program and found out that I was good at explaining new technology. I did a lot more research and think that I might go into engineering."

Observation #13. Students do not trust others, especially parents, to make decisions for them. They believe they are their own best decisionmakers. They reported having to get information from schools, adults, parents, peers, but want to *and expect to* make decisions for themselves. They made it clear that they want to make decisions based on experiences that are seen and felt directly.

- **School Administrator:** "I think kids are much more capable of making choices than most people believe."

- **Student:** "If I need my parents help I'll ask for it."

- **Student:** "I would rather do it alone. This is my own choice. I don't want to have Mom telling me 'Do this like your father.' If you want to look up how to be a brain surgeon, just for the heck of it, you don't want to get told not to do that."

- **Student:** "My mom is a nurse and she told me right away 'you're not working at a hospital.' I actually think it is kind of interesting to become a doctor or something. Maybe I did want to get a job in the health industry, but she isn't letting me."

- **Student:** "A lot of parents want to get involved in their son or daughter's career choices but I think most of them can get overanxious about it because they really want to get into the career themselves. Parents ought to take more of a sideline approach to their kid's careers and make suggestions and maybe have a more open mind towards things. They should not make the actual choice."

- **Student:** "Your parents should be involved because they can give you a lot of guidance and they are the ones who are out in the work world. They can give you an opinion but I don't think they should make the decision."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "Parents can't dictate but they can help a child explore what it is they are interested in."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "It isn't surprising that students don't want parents that closely involved. Parents don't know what's out there today. Parents often come from very prejudicial viewpoints and tend to restrict their child's choices."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "Most parents don't like to talk to their kids about careers. It's almost like talking about the birds and the bees."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "Parents have a much different perspective about what their child is going to do than their kid does. Parents may insist that 'my kid is going to college' and deny what shows from the student's classwork, transcript, and grades. The minute a counselor talks about careers the parent says 'No, that's not a career for my kid—he's going to college.' You have to call the kid into your office a week later and ask their real feelings. A lot of kids get this college hang-up right from the parents."

- **Student:** "We're the ones that will be working for the rest of our lives. We should be the ones making the decisions."

- **Student:** "We don't want our parents to choose for us."

Observation #14. Today, the burden of choosing a direction is solely on each student. Yet the value and relevance of experiences, jobs, and school courses seem completely trial and error. Students agreed that they carry away virtually nothing from any experience unless they already had some focus at the start. They are starving to draw relevance and meaning from every opportunity.

- **Student:** "You have to go to school for what you want to do."

- **School Administrator:** "There are a lack of choices available for many kids. They get to be seniors and find out that they didn't take the right course or don't have a high enough grade point average, and can't get any good jobs because they have no experience. By default kids simply get shuffled some place. They don't make affirmative choices."

Observation #15. Students, parents, and counselors suggested that students ought to develop a 'career plan'. This plan would tie together experiences gained from several activities, including career exploration, job shadowing, and other part-time jobs, and others. The plan would represent a student's tentative focus, and would provide a benchmark with which to compare all other experiences—including youth apprentice learning—during the remainder of high school. Because of concern that a specifically targeted job may not exist by the time a student leaves high school, the plan would have to be general and flexible, representing a narrowing of options rather than the ultimate selection of a single choice. The groups spoke only about a *career* plan, and did not focus on any broader concept, such as an individualized student learning plan that might incorporate goal setting, self-evaluation, academic planning, plus a broader look at choices for the post-high school years.

- **Guidance Counselor:** "In the ideal situation, you would have a one-to-one-to-one contact between the student and the family and have a chance to go over a career portfolio or achievement. It has to be a joint effort between the school, the student and the

parent. It would be very important to share with the parent things the student has done and the direction that they are moving. If you rely on the student to relay that to the parent it is not going to happen."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "You can make a five-year plan, but the jobs that will be available then do not even exist now. So a career plan needs to be flexible, and a kid needs to be able to make changes. It's more difficult developmentally with younger students because they are not as aware of what is out there. We need to make opportunities available at a younger age so students don't get to the beginning of their junior year without some idea of what they want to do. The process has to get them moving in a direction."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "We have a program where we ask our 6th, 7th, and 8th graders to establish three goals about careers. For most of these kids, the jobs they will actually hold haven't even been invented yet. When those kids get to be seniors in high school, who knows what those careers are going to be? Sometimes we ask kids too early what they want to do. There will be a mismatch between asking them to choose too early and what these kids will really face."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "People are crying today for nurses. If you tell every 6th, 7th, or 8th grader today about nursing, by the time they get to be seniors the nursing market will be flooded."

Observation #16. Some counselors expressed a degree of pessimism. For example, a few counselors believed that high school students would not really be interested in enrolling in a youth apprenticeship or other work-based learning program because they tended to be unrealistic about career prospects—sort of an 'everyone wants to be a doctor syndrome.' These counselors clearly associated work-based learning options with lower status occupations. A few counselors believed that students are developmentally unable to make any lasting choice by the 10th grade. Others expressed concern that asking students to make a commitment to a single choice was too inflexible.

- **Guidance Counselor:** "There is a tension in that we tell people to follow through on their commitments but also to keep lots of

flexible options. Commitment is not something to be taken lightly."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "Young adults want to extend the time they don't have to make big decisions. People avoid making decisions in part because they don't want to foreclose options. Making a commitment implies taking on the responsibility to follow through. It is a societal problem."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "Even if you have exploratory activities at an early age, kids aren't developmentally ready by 10th grade to make a commitment. Their ability to see reality and assess their own abilities and interests is minimum. We don't consider them adults and we don't try them on their decisions in a court of law and yet we're asking them to make developmental decisions that will affect the rest of their lives."

The Role of Labor Market Information

Observation #17. Guidance counselors at the school level bear the burden of developing and organizing career information for students. Everyone realizes the impossibility that a counselor faces in trying to keep track of changes to the many thousands of occupations. Yet there is no regular flow of information about jobs, wages, occupational skill needs and changes that are taking place in the local, state, national, or international economies. It is clear that this lack of systematic information forces students to rely on relatively ad hoc substitutes—parents, neighbors, and peers—which are often poor substitutes and don't add up to a labor market *system*.

- **Guidance Counselor:** "Counselors are on their own in terms of how to deal with career information. What system you use, what resources do you have? You are on your own."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "I pick things up in the media, and come across newspaper articles and magazine stories."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "With 12,000 job titles out there, its impossible to know what is happening in them all. When I was in college, I took one class in career counseling. The rest of the courses

were actually in counseling—one-on-one counseling, small group techniques, and other tools that you would actually use as a counselor. But nothing in college ever dealt with the nuts and bolts of what is out there."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "We are lacking in career knowledge. We are a member of the Wisconsin Career Information System and we don't even use it. There are resources out there we don't use."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "There is a real lack of accurate information in the schools that is easily accessible to us. If I want to use the Wisconsin Career Information System, I need deeper pockets. Our school district couldn't afford to keep the system anymore."

Reactions to the Proposed Community-based Career Center

Observation #18. Participants valued the concept of a community-based career information center that provided for direct participation by business and industry.

- **Guidance Counselor:** "One positive thing about this career information center is that it will really require industry and educators to work closer together. The burden is clearly on the employers to bring forth the information. As long as counselors don't believe this will replace them in terms of their role."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "Is this Job Service now? Is this too much like what already exists? No, this is clearly more. There, you only have list of jobs available. That information isn't giving you any direction in terms of labor market dynamics."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "I think the community would take more ownership of something like that than perhaps just feel that it is only another tax burden. We're buying something else for the school but have it open to whoever wanted to use it. Having a community based center managed by business would give the community more ownership."

Observation #19. Participants recognized that the functions proposed for this center were not served currently by existing institutions, especially school-based career centers and were important to making a school-to-work effort succeed.

- **Student:** *[Is your current school career center helpful?]* "There is not a lot of individual attention. You have to work things out for yourself."

- **Student:** *[Is your current school career center helpful?]* "All they do is refer to you other books and stuff. They need to know a little bit more about things. The counselor is more like a librarian who helps you find a book you want."

- **Student:** *[Is your current school career center helpful?]* " No. They didn't know anything that could help me. I had to ask my boss and my dad and they helped me more than anyone at school ever did."

- **Student:** *[Is your current school career center helpful?]* "They have a lot of weird occupations there for career days. The workers just tell you the bad points about their job. They are not very professional. One was real nervous and didn't do a very good job. I didn't get a good feel for the job at all. This doesn't represent all career days but those kind of presentations are kind of spotty."

- **Guidance Counselor:** *[How about career information from technical colleges?]* "My personal opinion is that technical colleges don't have the breadth of information that is necessary."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "You need to avoid duplication of services. This is the same kind of information that a junior high, high school, or adult needs. 75% of our current workforce needs retraining in the next ten years. When you go through a retraining, you are also looking at possible career changes. So you need to have the information available to the adult population, too. Why have two facilities when you can have the same information in one, with some flexibility in scheduling."

- **Student:** "If there was someone from the career that kids could just talk to it would be great. They want to know how much you make, what did you start out at? How long did it take to do that? Where did you go to school? Did you have to go somewhere

special for training? We know the right questions. We need to talk to someone with the answers."

- **Student:** "They say that jobs will keep changing and what you do five years from now might be totally different because of all the continuous training. Something like this would be great because you could go back and they could set you up with a class or a program. Everything would be right there in one place. Compare that to what I just did recently. My Mom gave me business cards from fifteen people and I called every one trying to find an engineer I could talk to. It was a wild goose chase."

Observation #20. Students were enthusiastic about placing a career center in the community and not as part of a school. In fact, they reported a higher likelihood that they would use the center as a resource if it were not mandated as a part of a school's curriculum. Counselors and school administrators were more likely to support the center if it were made a part of the school.

- **Student:** *[Community-based center away from school?]* "Yes. It would be better. More kids would go because it would be away from school. They would look at it with a whole new perspective. It's now like 'Oh, I have to do this for a class' and they couldn't make you do it as a class. They could let you go during the school day."

- **Student:** "Kids would take it more seriously because they would be doing it for themselves and not doing it for the sake of a class or trying to please the teachers."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "Put this in the school to be used by students during the day."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "This center in my way of thinking should be at the school library. That is where the population of users is located."

Observation #21. Participants agreed that such a center would be most valuable if it served the needs of the whole community.

- **Student:** "That would be great. There are a lot of people who want to change their jobs. They could use it too."
- **Parent:** "It should be for both. You would want the mix of ages to get a slice of real life."
- **Parent:** "I've often thought I would maybe like to change my own career. It would be nice to have somewhere to go to."
- **Student:** "It would be good for everyone."
- **Guidance Counselor:** "Need to make this available during the school day to students and in the evening to adults in the community."
- **Guidance Counselor:** "Put it where it makes most sense for the community. Scheduling has to be user friendly."
- **Parent:** "The Chamber of Commerce has everything necessary to do this—a place, meeting rooms, connected with other chambers."
- **Guidance Counselor:** "In some districts it ought to be in the school, and in others it would be in the community. It ought to be put where it makes the most sense."

Observation #22. Participants recognized that a community-based career center would be a valuable resource to supplement the activities of school counselors. Counselors saw their role changing to that of a 'broker' between the school and the center.

- **Parent:** "It's most realistic for counselors to act as broker to community services. From the fiscal standpoint, we will never have enough counselors. Take the financial burden off the schools and put it on the community, which will gain from that."
- **Guidance Counselor:** "Nothing substitutes for face-to-face discussion with someone who works in that job."

The Role of Counselors in the School-to-Work Transition Initiative

Observation #23. Despite some clear examples where career counseling activities were integrated into the curriculum and delivered as a part of the classroom, guidance and counseling appears essentially auxiliary to school-based education. Students and parents both voiced an extremely high appreciation of guidance counselors, but spoke in terms that suggested the counselors were not linked directly to the main purpose of schooling.

- **Guidance Counselor:** "I see the counseling function being much more integrated into the teaching and learning function under this new approach than it is today. Self-assessment is a big thing we are working on with the students today. Those skills need to be taught in preparation for something like this. Students will have to self-assess and then share the results with a counselor well before a 10th Grade Gateway Assessment."

- **Parent:** "You can't just take a course and think you know about careers. You can't take a chemistry course and think you know what it is like to be a nurse with specific, practical knowledge about the use of chemistry on that job. It has to be together."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "I feel I can be a resource to suggest teaching methods based on different learning styles. Often the teacher may find it works well and they are willing to adapt their teaching style and then find it works for a number of children. It is very threatening to some of our teachers to change what they have already learned and used. Their teaching style is the only thing they know."

Observation #24. Students and parents see a need for having a counselor at school who is available talk to students about personal or family issues.

One focus group of parents was unanimous that career counseling and social/personal counseling should be divided between functionally separate counselors. In contrast, counselors were just as strong in advocating keeping these functions together. They view the proposals of the K-12 Counseling Implementation Panel as supporting their ability

to implement the WDGM, and value a proactive, holistic view of student counseling.

Overall, there is a clear tension, probably based on the lack of available time to accomplish all tasks well, between meeting the needs of students proactively through the WDGM and the need for counselors to be available for crisis intervention.

- **Guidance Counselor:** "We've achieved a good balance in knowing when to switch between the proactive WDGM and the need to deal with student intervention. As a counselor, a majority of my time (six hours each day) is spent with students who are at-risk. Ten percent of the students get ninety percent of your time."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "Counselors ought to implement the Wisconsin Developmental Guidance Model. That is what counselors ought to do. The career center could relieve counselors from a lot of things they are doing now and let them focus more on just counseling."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "Personal, social and career counseling go together. There has to be a single expert who knows that student well."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "I worry that careers will be given priority at expense of other parts of WDGM."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "I don't separate the three areas. But, developing personal-social skills often take priority over trying to answer the question 'what are you going to be when you grow up?' We have kids that aren't going to be anything unless they have better personal and social skills. You have to start where the student is and go from there."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "I don't see them as three distinct areas. Any time you look at personal and social development, you are also dealing with career development. We need to show this overlap more directly and it needs to be communicated clearly. "

- **Guidance Counselor:** *[Do you know when to refer a student to a medical professional for active therapy?]* "There isn't a counselor who would want to do more [for a student at the school]. We know where the line is; we know the limit. We can decide when some issue ought to referred to social services and

when something ought to stay within the school. We do it now."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "There are a lot of situations out there when you just don't need to refer a student out to a community agency—like when a student fails an exam, or lots of everyday things we all deal with. The majority of time I spend with students is on small things that students struggle with. I'm not willing to give that up."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "It is hard to quantify those things you're talking about. The whole field is a quality of things. It's the whole nature of the profession."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "One-to-one counseling takes a lot of time. You can do some things in a group, but a lot of career counseling is going to be of the one-to-one variety. This will take a lot of time if it will be done right and effectively."

Observation #25. Counselors acknowledge that development, certification and licensing of counselors doesn't focus enough on school-to-work transition. Knowledge of the economy, workforce skill needs and occupational changes is limited. Parents and students went further, expressing the belief that counselors are products of a 'college culture' and lack significant workforce experiences.

- **Guidance Counselor:** "Based on my own counselor training experience, my coursework and experience in career preparation was extremely negligent. It was non-existent. We need to provide that kind of training for counselors before we try to implement this type of a program. What will happen is that the teachers who are going through in-service and staff development will begin looking toward guidance counselors for leadership and direction. If we don't have that in place before we attempt to implement this, teachers are going to see this as another add-on. The foundation has to be there, it has to be throughout the curriculum, it has to be a total commitment to make this system work."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "As counselors, we all earn a certain number of credits for recertification. I think a primary direction should be that these should be in the career education area in-

stead of taking useless classes just to fulfill a re-certification requirement. Let's get the teacher preparation institutions to put together something really effective and functional that helps counselors provide that leadership role."

- **School Administrator:** "Technical college courses and work experience should count towards recertification of counselors if we believe work experience is important."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "We only go out two or three times each year into various industries for an afternoon. We take a tour of the building, and talk with industry representatives."

- **Student:** *[Does counselor do much career counseling?]* "Not really. He is good about choosing a college."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "When counselors first go out in this field they are better prepared to help the college bound student. They have to work very hard to become more familiar with other options."

The Role of Teachers in the School-to-Work Transition Initiative

Observation #26. The focus groups were clear that very few teachers are prepared to (a) participate in a new environment that emphasizes hands-on learning, (b) define the role of teacher as a facilitator, and (c) take active steps to become more familiar with needs of business and the community.

- **School Administrator:** "It is completely unrealistic to assume that the people on my staff have the skills to even begin talking with kids about jobs and the workplace when they haven't had those kinds of experiences themselves."

- **School Administrator:** "We have to figure out a system that enables teachers and counselors to have these experiences themselves. Teachers need to understand that when career education is one of your main goals then *all* disciplines, not just the shop class or the guidance counselors office, have a responsibility for

career awareness. One of your implementation problems is that teachers have no reality base outside of their area of focus."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "It is going to take more than the counselors. Teachers are a big part of this. Teachers will have to go out into businesses and bring that back into their classroom."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "There are two things we have to do. First is to get at the teacher preparation institutions to make changes so that the teachers are coming into the profession with stronger abilities in hands-on learning. Then we have to do something in terms of staff development. If counselors are in tune with this, they can give some leadership and model new behaviors to help transition this kind of change. I think part of the leadership role is going to be to show that we are not afraid to change."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "All the activities you are suggesting, are you saying they will be part of the school? I don't have a problem with those ideas but take them to the teachers and you won't get the same response."

- **School Administrator:** "Teachers would resist additional involvement with career development. They have too narrow a view of that subject."

- **School Administrator:** "We need to provide work experiences for teachers so that they can function as counselors and include important information from outside the classroom into the system."

- **Student:** "You wouldn't ever see a math teacher working in a factory. They didn't go to school for that."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "An inherent danger we have in education is that most of the people who are in education, the teachers, came through the college route. They came through using a lecture method of instruction, even though we know that most high school students tune out in a lecture situation. So we need to take a look at different learning styles. We need to expand that to look at other learning opportunities."

The Role of Business and Industry in the School-to-Work Transition Initiative

Observation #27. All focus groups recognized the vital role of increased participation by the employer community. Few believed that employers were really involved that much with schools. The groups were split on whether there was sufficient employer and industry interest in school-to-work transition—to work more actively with teachers an counselors, to create job shadowing opportunities, to provide 'demand side' information about jobs and wages, etc.

- **Guidance Counselor:** "The businesses need to be available. Every high school should have a business library with all the different companies in the area showing whether they need graduates with a college degree or a technical school degree, and showing salary levels."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "Sometimes a few of the best seniors got to go on a field trip to see the office. But this is window dressing. It makes the employers look good because they can say they are involved in the schools when they really aren't."

- **Parent:** "There are some businesses out there ready to make that commitment."

- **Parent:** "The career center at school is not a place you can really learn about jobs in the community. It is almost incumbent upon industry to provide the opportunities. *We* are the employers who are complaining that students who are coming out of school aren't educated to our needs. Business must become involved with the school somehow and offer these types of shadowing and practical experiences."

- **Parent:** "You need a lot more communication between the business world and education. A lot of times we get lost in the curriculum and never provide the input we want. We would love to come to the schools and share our needs in terms of the skills we want."

- **School Administrator:** "My sense is that the real needs of any community are not generally recognized by business and industry. They operate in their own sheltered environments that are disconnected from the community."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "The businesses in our community are very receptive to it. I think the trouble will be getting them to commit to allow our students to come in and actually learn at work, to job shadow, and to come in for youth apprenticeship and other work programs. We don't have that going now. Who is going to direct those programs? Is that a counselor's responsibility? I don't see our counselors having the time right now to put into this."

Reactions to Proposals for Social Service Referral

Observation #28. Virtually every focus group was unanimous in believing that community social services are unable to accommodate counseling needs of students. Counselors were especially protective of the need to deliver services to students when they are in need, and recognized that the school system is often the only reliable provider of services. Even students voiced a reluctance to be asked to seek services outside the schools—and cited several obstacles that would deter them from pursuing outside counseling.

- **Guidance Counselor:** "I'm laughing about the ideas on crisis intervention. Social services are cutting, cutting, cutting. County services are not real helpful. If we are to rely on them, they need to be funded better and have the capacity to accept referrals. At this point they could not. The issues are quality and availability."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "To get social services to come into your schools the student has to be bleeding."

- **Student:** "It's better to keep it in schools. A lot of kids are having problems because they don't know where to go or what to do."

- **Student:** "Kids can't tell their parents everything—like if they are getting beat up at home they can't tell their parents that they want to make an appointment to see some counselor who is not in school."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "It took us four days to see someone. Agencies are so shorthanded."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "It seems a little bit backward. I could see dealing with *career counseling* on a referral basis and this would allow us to do more of the social delivery in the schools. When a kid is going ballistic down the hall, we can't call an agency and ask them to set up a time to come in. Kids don't schedule their problems to happen on a Monday, Wednesday or Friday."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "Experience tells you that it isn't going to get done if you rely on outside agencies. They will do the burning emergencies but they are not going to have an everyday connection with the kids."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "Our community program has a six-week waiting list to get in. If you are in crisis they might get you in today but all they can do is set up an appointment to see you again in two weeks. In the meantime, who is going to hold the fort down? And even if a student is in deep crisis, the agency is still going to come right back to the schools and tell us to watch him for them. The only way they will pull a student back into the agency is if the student creates a problem in the community—like getting in trouble with the law, or a life threatening situation. This is a simple staffing problem. It's not that they don't care, but they just don't have the people out there."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "We just can't take these kids who are having problems and shift them to an already overworked, overburdened system. You are giving somebody outside of the school that does not have daily contact with that student. If you are removed, you don't know what is going on."

- **Student:** "What if you don't drive yet? You can't just jump on your bike and ride across town to talk to someone."

- **Student:** "You have to start another relationship with someone else."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "I've seen kids contemplating suicide in the fourth grade. I have had kids who have been shot at the night before or witnessed a shooting of their neighbor and then come to school the next day. You don't come in and tell the kid that 'I'll refer you out and maybe they can set up a time to talk with you about this.' Everyone is overwhelmed, outside social agencies as well. It's ludicrous to consider any kind of referral system. They just aren't equipped to take on the numbers of

students. If a counselor is in the building, he or she is right there to deal with the problem on the spot."

Proposed Activities for a New System

Observation #29. Counselors did not see their role changing dramatically under the School-to-Work Transition Initiative. Most did not see their job changing considerably from what it is today and what encouraged them to enter into the guidance field in the first place. Part of this view stems from the fact that the WDGM, if implemented fully, would integrate appropriate amounts of proactive developmental student counseling directly into the educational curriculum. On the pessimistic side, it could also be that counselors didn't have a clear vision of a fundamentally new educational system, and therefore had difficulty seeing how much their roles might truly change in the coming years.

- **Guidance Counselor:** "I don't perceive that what is being proposed as modifying the role of the counselor significantly."
- **Guidance Counselor:** "Who is to argue against having more information? WDGM still defines what we do with kids."
- **Guidance Counselor:** "I like what I read in this report. I went to school to be a counselor and not to be just a career counselor. There has been a distinction between being a personal counselor and a career counselor."
- **Guidance Counselor:** "To redefine our goal as doing more career counseling is really not fair. We are trained to do more things."
- **Guidance Counselor:** "New focus on career does not threaten WDGM"
- **Guidance Counselor:** "I could see needing more career focus."

Observation #30. All groups agreed that direct at-the-workplace experiences for students must happen earlier in each student's development. Tangible experiences must be created so that students can 'feel' what a job and working are all about.

- **Parent:** "I really believe it is important to give students a wide range of choices long before the end of high school. They need to be exposed to all the different kinds of things that they can choose to go into starting from a very young age—as soon as they start school they should be made aware that there are choices that are not gender-specific, that there are other things they could go into. We need real, practical experiences that will make students feel good about themselves and that options are there if they choose."

- **Guidance Counselor:** "Job shadowing, done early. And not just once but many, many times. Even if this means more school release time, arranging transportation, getting commitments from business, training employers. It's got to be part of the same package."

- **Student:** "I spent two days with some diesel mechanics and I helped them work on buses. It was fun. It was hands-on. It really helped me make my decision to do that for a job."

- **Student:** []"I had to follow this lady around at the newspaper office. It was okay, but I wasn't really interested in that kind of work. They picked it for me. I didn't have a choice."

- **Student:** "Definitely. That would be fun. A lot of kids might take it just to get a day off of school, but you might find a career you would like."

- **Parent:** *[Are kids old enough to learn from job shadowing in middle school?]* "Yes, as long as there is a follow-up with review. The problem with job shadowing is that it usually used just as a point of interest and not as an educational opportunity that might lead to something."

- **School Administrator:** "I advocate for major changes in school structure in the upper elementary years. By 5th or 7th grade kids are totally turned off to school, either because they are bored or because they have high math anxiety or they see that hard work in school doesn't pay off in terms of jobs. We need to focus on this key period in order to have students that can enter the high school years with an ability and eagerness to learn."

Observation #31. Career counseling, like all services, must be customized to the unique needs of individuals. A strong personal touch is necessary out of any new system.

- **Student:** "There should be more of a check up between counselors and students. Right now, in freshman year you fill out a form. In sophomore year and junior year they see you once. In senior year they ask you if you are going to college and they make sure you have enough credits to graduate. That's the end of it. There should be more of a personal guidance. There should be more counselors to get more personalized."

IV. Recommendations

1. **Continue with implementation of School-to-Work Transition Initiative.** There is strong support for a new approach to schooling, especially among students and their parents. Counselors and school administrators spoke less about the key concept of combining work-based learning with classroom academics, but spoke fervently about the need for fundamental restructuring of the school system.

   At the same time, schools appear to have made little progress in moving toward a new vision of schools, to the significant frustration of many constituencies.

2. **As a matter of approach, Wisconsin needs to be very clear in presenting the Initiative as part of a fundamental restructuring of the public school system** and not just a new mandate coming from the state's central administration to local schools and school districts. Specific programmatic components—like youth apprenticeship, the gateway assessment, for example—are significant departures from the old secondary school paradigm. But we detected very little understanding of systemic change across the entire system.

3. **Wisconsin must speed its efforts to market the Initiative,** since there is a large degree of misunderstanding, misinformation, and general unawareness about the specifics of the proposals and how they will affect the schools. The state must especially develop a strong public education effort that emphasizes the high skills and positive earning potential of occupations that are the initial targets for development. The image of 'school-to-work' among some groups does not currently represent the reality that these programs will be highly competitive and will have strong skill standards, and high expectations of students.

4. **Wisconsin must develop meaningful strategies for teacher licensing and in-service training.** Most focus groups were pessimistic about the ability of teachers to engage in a school-to-work environment—whether in youth-oriented career exploration and career guidance activities, or in working with business and industry to meet occupationally focused standards and competencies. As recommended by a school counselor, 'we have to figure out a

system that enables teachers and counselors to have these experiences themselves.'

5. **Wisconsin must also have clear strategies for the licensing and recertification of guidance counselors,** providing far stronger preparation and understanding of career guidance, economic change, and ways to accommodate students counseling needs with respect to career and occupational preparation.

6. **Wisconsin must support continued development of the WDGM,** which is an appropriate framework for organizing guidance and counseling activities within the public schools of the state. The vision of the WDGM is to integrate developmental counseling as a part of a student's basic classroom education. Ideally, it would support creative, customized assessment that respond to the unique experiences of individual students. This is even more appropriate in a world where academic subjects are integrated well with each other and with community-based and work-based learning.

7. **Schools (as well as Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction) must develop a solution to the problem of high student-to-counselor ratios** that inhibit the ability of providing individualized, customized holistic counseling. Most constituencies agree that student counseling must be much more individualized in the future, which is impossible under the current delivery system.

   While some counselors disagreed with the findings of the K-12 Panel with regard to the administrative burdens they face, all counselors agreed to the need to develop a more encompassing support network that meets the needs of students under the comprehensive framework of the WDGM.

8. **Wisconsin must develop a clear vision of how school-to-work transition, as well as the new approaches to career guidance and counseling, will be implemented in smaller communities and rural school districts.**

9. **The role of business and industry in providing accurate, up-to-date labor market information—the availability of jobs, necessary skill levels, wage and salary data—is an open question.** Similarly, the willingness of business and industry to participate as an equal (or leading) partner of a school-to-work system is a concern. Wisconsin must proceed with its efforts to involve private and public employers in organizing themselves to provide the quality and

quantity of work experiences and information necessary to implement a new system of workforce preparation.

10. **The vision of new approaches to career guidance and counseling must retain a role for counselors to provide on-call support** that is accessible to help students meet personal and social developmental concerns.

11. **Wisconsin must re-think its plan to increase dependence on community-based social service agencies.** There is virtually no support for social service referral outside of the school under current conditions, which include lack of quality, quantity, and accessibility of youth services.

Overall, the group discussions outlined a fairly clear vision of the essential elements of a guidance and counseling model that would support a school-to-work initiative. Briefly, these elements are:

- **systematic, regularized career awareness activities that begin during the early middle school years**, which might include career days, field trips, release time from school to enable children to go to work with a parent or neighbor, etc.;

- structured job shadowing during the late middle school years, continuing into the ninth and tenth grades, that give students **direct, in-depth, hands-on (to the extent practicable) experiences** with employers;

- preparation of a **career plan** that:

  - builds on practical knowledge gained in job shadowing;

  - uses all resources available to help a student express a proposed focus in a career plan that lays out some clear, realistic options for completing high school and continuing on to postsecondary experiences;

  - puts down on paper a student's affirmative choice of a career plan that is very flexible at the beginning and narrows as one gets older and develop more outside-school experience; and

- should be part of a broader individualized goal-setting process whereby a student has identified a range of post-high school goals;

- the use of a **community-based career center** that contains reliable, easy-to-use information about employers, occupations, wages, job openings, skill qualifications, and education or training options;

- a fundamental re-orientation of school to deliver **focused learning opportunities through practical, hands-on experiences** and approaches;

- **guidance and counseling services that are fully integrated with the school curriculum;**

- **career counseling that helps a student constantly re-evaluate the continued validity of a career plan by reviewing the impact of school-based and work-based experiences;**

- career counseling that supports the **holistic vision** of the Wisconsin Developmental Guidance Model.